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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000232

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOVI](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: LATEST CLAIMS OF "RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION" DON'T WASH

REF: A) 03 HCMC 0710 B) 03 HCMC 0766 C) 03 HCMC 0933 D) 03

HCMC 1222

1. (SBU) On March 4, ConGen received information from U.S.-based sources that Vietnamese public security officers had surrounded the home of Mennonite Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang in District 2 of HCMC, at 16:15 local time on March 2. The security officials were alleged to have ordered everyone who was inside the house, including visiting Kon Tum Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh, to report to the local police station. The situation was said to be "quite tense," as the believers refused to obey the police and remained inside the home. According to the reports, the raid included elements from the Binh Khanh Ward police and a unit "reportedly involved in liquidating opponents." By March 5, the ConGen and Embassy had heard variations on this report from third-country diplomats and a U.S. Congressional staffer. Information on this case was also presented by a USG official during a press conference covering other issues related to religious freedom in Vietnam.

2. (SBU) Immediately after receiving the initial report, Post was able to easily contact Pastor Quang at his home. The story he told in the course of a 30-minute telephone conversation was very different. He said the confrontation began after Pastor Chinh had already left HCMC for Kon Tum (where he returned without incident). One of Quang's followers noticed two familiar-looking men, whom he thought were watching them, hanging out near the house. When Quang and his follower went out to photograph the men and their license plates, the men tried to prevent them from taking pictures. A scuffle ensued (Post could not get Quang to say who started it), but Quang managed to keep the camera. The men then tried to flee on their motorbikes, but skidded and flipped off the vehicles. At this point, some of Quang's followers tried to prevent them from leaving. They eventually got away, but Quang kept one of the motorbikes. Some time later that day, uniformed police returned to Quang's house to get the bike back. They also wanted Quang to sign some sort of statement about disturbing the peace. Quang refused both requests, another physical altercation ensued (Quang would not say who started it -- Post could not pin him down as to who started it), and one of Quang's followers was detained. Two others were detained after they followed their colleague to the police station, but Quang had no further contact with the police.

3. (SBU) Comment: This case demonstrates a growing problem Post faces in dealing with a more provocative stance by religious freedom activists in Vietnam. Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang and his associates are involved in one way or another with nearly every celebrated case of alleged religious persecution in HCMC over the past year (reftels). Unfortunately, his track record is one of engaging in deliberately provocative acts for the purpose of generating international attention. Even his own colleagues in the underground Protestant house church community acknowledge that he embellishes his claims to make his point. But they know what he knows: In the Internet Age, this sort of information is quickly snatched up by a variety of NGOs and Vietnamese expatriate groups and used to demonstrate that the human rights situation in Vietnam is deteriorating. If the facts turn out to be different, no one will ever go back and publish a correction. Meanwhile, we are concerned that scarce resources are being diverted from genuine cases of human rights and religious freedom abuses.

YAMAUCHI